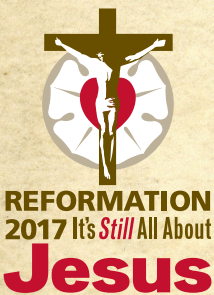
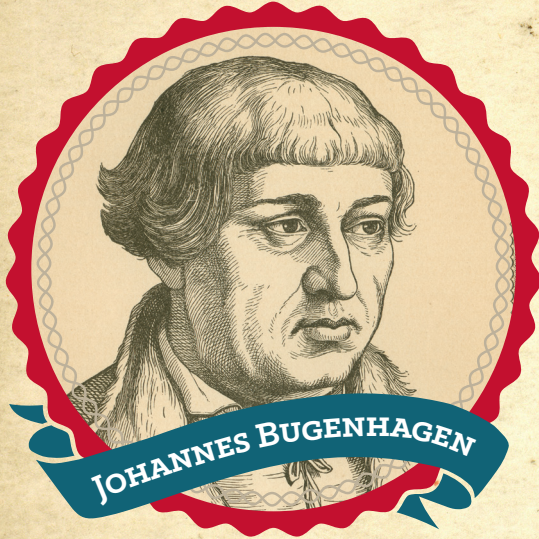


FACES OF THE REFORMATION

JOHANNES BUGENHAGEN

Born: June 24, 1485 | Wollin, Germany
(formerly Pomerania)

Died: April 20, 1558 | Wittenberg, Germany



LutheranReformation.org

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Luther's friend and pastor who made Reformation theology practical for churches

JOHANNES BUGENHAGEN IS FAMOUS FOR HIS ROLE AS THE PASTOR AT THE WITTENBERG CITY CHURCH, ST. MARY'S, which made him Martin Luther's pastor and confessor. Bugenhagen first encountered Luther's writings to refute them. Instead, Luther's words convinced Bugenhagen, who moved to Wittenberg to study in 1521. He embodied Luther's theology and was the first priest in Wittenberg to get married. In 1523 he became the pastor of St. Mary's and developed a close relationship with Luther. He performed the marriage of Luther and Katie in 1525 and preached at Luther's funeral in 1546. Bugenhagen, Luther, Justus Jonas and Philipp Melanchthon comprised the inner circle of the Wittenberg reformers. Bugenhagen sided with Luther against John Agricola on Christian freedom, and was the first in Wittenberg to oppose Zwingli's theology of the Lord's Supper.

Although Bugenhagen is most famous for his role as Luther's pastor, his lasting contribution is the way he applied Luther's theology as an administrator of churches in northern Germany and Scandinavia. Bugenhagen applied Luther's theology, which was written to address specific theological issues in the climate of the Reformation, to the daily life of individual churches. He developed proper practices for individual churches and pastors to follow. He balanced the theological directives that defined the Reformation (e.g., justification by faith) with the ordinary practices necessary for the functioning of a healthy church. Bugenhagen published several church orders (*Kirchenordnungen*) which were copied and became manuals for Reformation churches.

Bugenhagen made theology relevant to congregants. He translated Luther's Bible into Low German to make it more accessible, and created a harmony of the Passion Narrative to make it easier to memorize for devotional life. His church orders addressed practical elements of how rites should be established for weekly use. For example, he applied Luther's theology of the Lord's Supper to everyday congregational life: to whom it should be distributed, the proper preparation for the Sacrament, and when to excommunicate someone. Further, he used the principle of *adiaphora* (things neither commanded nor forbidden) to allow for accommodation of cultural practices in balance with the truth of the Gospel. While he agreed, for example, that the Gospel should be preached in the vernacular, he also allowed the singing of occasional songs in Latin if the youth were studying it in school and needed practice.

Bugenhagen emphasized the importance of the church in society. He emphasized education in German and Latin, so that the laity might receive the value of Luther's principle that they should have access to the Bible and theology. Bugenhagen applied Luther's two-kingdoms theology as he provided guidance for pastors and churches to serve the community through care for the sick, education and proper interaction with the governing authorities. This practical balance, which Bugenhagen championed, of maintaining the integrity of Lutheran theology while making it relevant and accessible to the laity, is an ongoing challenge for all Lutherans to this day.

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